

## Seven charged in connection to alleged labour trafficking ring

Seven people, including residents of York Region and Peel, are facing multiple charges related to labour trafficking.

The charges come after 64 Mexican-born nationals were found by York Regional Police's (YRP) Special Victims Unit ? Human Trafficking Section and Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) to be ?exploited through an international labour trafficking ring,? said the YRP following an announcement at their Aurora headquarters on Friday morning.

?In November 2022, York Regional Police received information that Mexican nationals were being exploited for labour in York Region,? said the YRP. ?An investigation, dubbed Project Norte, revealed that an organized group of criminals enticed the victims into Canada with promises of good work and a better life. However, they ended up living in deplorable conditions and were driven to work sites in private buses which were in a state of disrepair. The workers were mistreated, abused, and exploited for manual labour at farms, factories and warehouses across the Greater Toronto Area. The victims lived in squalor and were compelled to work long hours for little pay, while their exploiters reaped the benefits of their labour and lived in luxury.

?On February 8, 2023, after an in-depth investigation, officers from York Regional Police, along with members of the OPP, the Toronto Police Service and Peel Regional Police, executed search warrants at five properties in the Town of East Gwillimbury and the Cities of Vaughan, Toronto and Mississauga. As a result, 64 exploited workers were rescued, five people were arrested and charged and two outstanding suspects had warrants issued for their arrest.?

Project Norte was a victim-centric investigation, the YRP noted. On the day of the warrants, a Victim Assistance Center was set up to provide food, shelter, medical attention, information and support services from police, CBSA, paramedics and community supports including Victim Services of York Region. Of the 64 people rescued, 53 accepted the offer of help and continue to be supported.

?This investigation has been a difficult one. To see the state of the workers' living conditions, considering the promises that were made to them, was heartbreaking,? said Chief Jim MacSween. ?The Spanish-speaking officers who assisted in the investigation were also deeply affected, as they could see the reflections of their own families and friends in the faces of these hardworking people who were only trying to find a better life.?

Among those charged are:

Tre Trinh, 45, of Vaughan who is charged with six counts of trafficking in person, and single counts Instructing Commission of Offence for Criminal Organization, Commission of Offence for Criminal Organization, Participation in Criminal Organization, and Material Benefit Resulting from Trafficking in Persons.

Thi Him Huyen Vu, 49, of Vaughan, who faces four charges of Trafficking in Persons, and single counts of Participating in Criminal Organization, and Material Benefit from Resulting from Trafficking in Persons.

Jesus Navarrete Garcia, 51, of Toronto, who faces 11 charges of Trafficking in Persons, three counts of Sexual Assault, and single charges of Instructing Commission of Offence for Criminal Organization, Commission of Offence for Criminal Organization, Participation in Criminal Organization, and Material Benefit Resulting from Trafficking in Person.

Monserrat Monjaras of Mississauga faces five charges of Trafficking in Persons, and single charges of Participation in Criminal Organization, and Material Benefit Resulting from Trafficking in Persons.

Hiram Amaury Martinez Rodriguez, 48, of East Gwillimbury, is facing two charges of Trafficking in Persons, and a single charge of Participating in Criminal Organization.

Warrants for Arrest are outstanding for Juan de Jesus Rosales Gomez, 31, of no fixed address, who faces a charge of Participation in Criminal Organization, and Luis Alberto Garcia Galvan, who is charged with Uttering Forged Document.

The charges have not been proven.